

Esther, the World that left God out Reminders & Reputations Esther 9:19 – 10:3

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Christian greetings and welcome to Truth for Today where we are concluding a series of five talks on the book of Esther which is one of the lesser-known books of the Old Testament. All quotations from Scripture today will be from the English Standard Version of the Scriptures unless otherwise stated.

Previous Events and Persons

Today's talk is entitled, "Reminders and Reputations" and as it is the final talk in the series, it might be as well to summarise the previous four talks to remind ourselves of the salient points of the story of Esther. I would judge that the best way to do this is to consider again the main characters in the book. These were the mighty king Ahasuerus, Esther who eventually became his queen, Mordecai, Esther's uncle, and Haman, a proud and arrogant courtier. Perhaps the most important event in the early part of the book is that Mordecai quietly saved the king's life.

Programme number 2, which bore the title "In the right place at the right time", demonstrated how that each of the named persons was affected by the events that came to pass. Haman was promoted to chief of the king's officials, Mordecai earned Haman's displeasure because he would not salute or do obeisance to him, especially when he learned that Haman planned to kill all the Jews in every province. Ahasuerus gave Haman the authority to do as he wished. Esther, a Jew, who was at first frightened to approach the king to plead for the lives of her people, installed a period of fasting before entering the king's presence. This she did without his permission. A very dangerous action which could have resulted in her death.

Chapter 5 and verse 11 of Esther succinctly sums up the character of Haman:

"And Haman recounted to them the splendour of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honoured him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king."

Haman was a man who would fit neatly into the 21st century materialistic society that we inhabit today. [The arrogance displayed by Haman in verse 6 of chapter 6 is breath-taking in its intensity:](#)

"So Haman came in, and the king said to him, 'What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honour?' And Haman said to himself, 'Whom would the king delight to honour more than me?'

From a rich, self-satisfied, chief courtier, who thought he was worthy of the prime place in the whole kingdom, we shall learn shortly how his reputation and whole future changed for ever. Meanwhile, the remaining chapters tell how the king's insomnia brought to light the action of Mordecai's saving of the king's life, and also how the tables were turned on Haman whose life was ended on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.

The Institution of the Feast of Purim

This short summary brings us neatly to the last portion of the book of Esther, namely chapter 9: 19 to 10: 3, which is our portion to consider this day. The verses immediately before this tell how the Jews celebrated their release from the dreadful persecution planned by Haman by allotting a day for feasting, resting, and rejoicing. Actually, they utilised two days for the celebrations as Esther 9: 18-19 make clear:

“But the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the thirteenth day and on the fourteenth, and rested on the fifteenth day, making that a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore the Jews of the villages, who live in the rural towns, hold the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day for gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and as a day on which they send gifts of food to one another.”

These verses explain why some Jews celebrated this feast, the Feast known as Purim, on the fifteenth day of Adar, whilst Jews living in the country or rural areas commemorated their release from Haman's threat of persecution on the fourteenth day of Adar. [I have no doubt that the scribes and students of the law would have long discussions as to what determined a rural village.](#) The following verses define for us the reason why this talk contains as part of its title the word, “Reminder.”

“And Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, obliging them to keep the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year, as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending food to one another and gifts to the poor” (Esther 9: 20-22).

This deliverance is still celebrated today under the banner of the Feast of Purim. [As we have seen it commemorates the deliverance or salvation of the Jews, whether young or old, from the wicked machinations of Haman who sought to do away with everyone one of them. For thousands of years this Feast of Purim, which must be traced to divine direction in the affairs of men, has been celebrated with feasting and gifts.](#) It can never be forgotten for, as we have just learned, there is an appointed day which is carefully kept to remind all Jews that on that particular occasion God's power was manifested for their safety.

The Christian's Feast of Remembrance

What then do we Christians have that enables us to celebrate God's salvation? I expect that many of us would immediately turn our minds to the so-called communion service, where we take bread and break it so that we each may eat a piece of the broken loaf. This was initiated by the Lord, as we learn from Scripture,

“And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this

in remembrance of me.' And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood'" (Luke 22, verses 19-20).

The apostle Paul makes the remembrance aspect of this action clearer when writing to the Corinthian church,

"...And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians chapter 11 verses 24-26).

And so it is that the Christian church has a sacred event to celebrate and to give thanks for. [Not this time an escape from the evil hands of the powerful in this world, but for a salvation that has an eternal efficacy.](#) The Lord's death deals with sin.

"...But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God" (Romans 5 verses 8-9).

God has done more for us through the death of the Lord Jesus than we could possibly imagine. Thankfully, Paul and the other apostles have recorded in Scripture some of the benefits of being a Christian.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1: verses 3-7).

Notice that our blessings are spiritual, therefore we cannot expect our faith to be rewarded with material gifts. The fact that we have been adopted into the family of God is greater than any material reward. We remember and recall in the breaking of bread the majestic greatness and glory of the One who has loved us and saved us. [We recall with gladness the immensity of His work upon the cross. Always let us remember that He has saved us and called us with a holy calling.](#)

Implications of Faith

There is much more that could be said regarding the great victory of the Lord when he dealt with sin and rose again from the dead, but we have not time. [I do want, however, to emphasise that our response should not be any less than the Jewish celebration of Purim.](#) Please note there is no time limit on our remembrance unlike that initiated by Mordecai which was convened annually. Our remembrance is, "as oft as you do this." It must be a regular response to demonstrate that we have not forgotten. [We have the regular reminder of bread and wine to show forth our gratitude for the divine deliverance.](#)

There is another aspect of the Purim remembrance that I wish to comment on which is that the Jews, in their celebrations, were not to forget the poor. Though there are no such additional instructions in the Christian's remembrance of the Lord Jesus, in the Scriptures we are instructed to remember the poor in both the Old Testament and the New:

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed” (Proverbs 19: 17).

And also:

“And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’ Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Mark 10: 21-22).

When we read such Scriptures, we must consider that Esther 9: 22, with its command not to forget the poor, is a reminder to us in our day of the implications of being a Christian. [The letter of James underlines our responsibilities in this matter of considering the poor. Also such chapters as Romans 12 indicate further personal consequences of following the Lord.](#)

Haman's Wicked Plot

We have seen previously how Haman was promoted by the king to a position of power where he could boast in his possessions and glory in his riches. The closing chapters of Esther reveal that his reputation and royal standing were trashed.

“For Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is, cast lots), to crush and to destroy them. But when it came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his evil plan which he had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows” (Esther 9: 24-25).

What now for the reputation of Haman, who had once gloried in his riches along with enjoying the supreme favour of the king? We also need to consider the change in status of the Jewish community from that recorded in Esther 3: 6:

“But he [Haman] disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.”

Having been delivered from imminent mass slaughter when the continuation of the chosen race was in the balance, they now had a permanent reminder of their massive deliverance which is still celebrated today.

Queen Esther's Influence

“Letters were sent to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, in words of peace and truth, that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther bound them, and as they had bound themselves,

and their offspring, with regard to their fasts and lamenting” (Esther 9: 30-31).

From this quotation we observe the importance of Queen Esther in the affairs of the kingdom. If you were listening to the programmes detailing the earlier chapters of Esther you will have observed that Vashti was queen, only to lose her position through her disobedience. Mainly through her beauty, Esther replaced Vashti in the king’s affections. Hence, we have another character from this book we are studying who changed places with a figure of importance. God is at work placing men (and women) in positions of influence.

King Ahasuerus’s Edict and Haman’s End

One important personage who was central to the change of fortune for the Jews was King Ahasuerus. His word was sacrosanct in his kingdom, yet it was simple insomnia that caused him to learn the truth which saved Mordecai and his people:

“On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus” (Esther 6: 1-2).

Something as petty as a bout of sleeplessness causes a dramatic change in the king’s attitude when he learns from the books how Mordecai had saved his life. [Here we have another figure whose attitude concerning Mordecai and his people is changed from enmity to friendly. One after another the players at the court of Ahasuerus are being moved and motivated to bring God’s earthly people to safety when an enemy is seeking to kill and destroy.](#)

We have considered the changes in the outlook and circumstances of King Ahasuerus. Queen Vashti has moved out of sight owing to self-will and peevishness. Esther is now the queen having displayed a brave and courageous spirit after a period of fasting when previously she was somewhat fearful. The Jews in every province are now secure after Mordecai’s advocacy with the king. The only man we have not really considered is Mordecai. We noticed earlier that Haman hated Mordecai, partly because he was a Jew and partly through him [Mordecai] not bowing to him.

“Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, ‘Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast.’ This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made” (Esther 5: 14).

The last mention of Mordecai in the book of Esther is the very last verse of the book:

For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people” (Esther 10: 3).

Mordecai’s Pre-eminence

[I think we all must agree that there was a great change in Mordecai’s personal affairs, having moved from a condemned man to second in the kingdom.](#) I am convinced that God (who is not mentioned in the book) worked through circumstances that seem every day, ordinary events, yet

obey the dictum that “God is working His purposes out.” We have witnessed how all the reputations of the main characters in the book of Esther were altered or amended.

Though we are coming to the end of today’s programme, I cannot finish without adding some comments on this last verse of Esther. I am sure you noticed that Mordecai was second in rank to the king, great among the Jews, popular with the multitude of his brothers, yet ever seeking the welfare of his people and always speaking peace. In his letter to the Colossians the apostle Paul brings before our gaze the greatness and glory of the Saviour.

The Pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus

“May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (Colossians 1:11-22).

I am aware that this is a long passage, but it is saturated with the sufficiency and fullness of the One who bore the cross, with all that such a death as the sin-bearer involved. One cannot begin to compare the wonder of the incarnation and atonement with Mordecai or any other character from Scripture. We follow the Lord Jesus who was sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world. Mordecai achieved great things for his people only and the time came when his influence faded. The Lord has brought us a salvation that never loses its power. Two thousand years after He died and rose again His salvation is still efficacious. He remains the One who ever reveals the Father to His followers and never ceases to be the Supreme Governor of the universe.

Thank you for listening to this broadcast from Truth for Today, number T1331 entitled “Reminders and Reputations” in the series “Esther, the World that left God out.”

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